

PLANNING GUIDANCE FOR GRP 2005

Introduction

The GRP is designed for the conservation of working agricultural lands. All successful applicants for GRP easements and rental agreements must have a conservation plan on the acreage involved. This conservation plan must include all conservation practices and management activities that will maintain the viability of the grasslands regardless of the grassland use (grazing, haying, wildlife).

The conservation plan must meet the standard for Prescribed Grazing (528A) for grazing systems, or for Forage Harvest Management (511) for hay harvesting operations. In addition, the program requires the conservation plan to include management activities to control invasive species, and a contingency plan for drought.

The Prescribed Grazing plan required for lands utilized for grazing activities will be dependent upon whether the land is pastureland or native grazing land (rangeland):

- ***Pastureland*** means a land cover/use category of land managed primarily for the production of introduced forage plants for grazing animals. Pastureland cover may consist of a single species in a pure stand, a grass mixture, or a grass-legume mixture. Management usually consists of cultural treatments such as fertilization, weed control, reseeding or renovation, and control of grazing. Pasture land is normally stocked at a relatively heavy rate (1 cow/calf pair per 1.25-1.5 acres) and managed intensively.
- ***Rangeland*** means a land cover/use category on which the climax or potential plant cover is composed principally of native grasses, grasslike plants, forbs, or shrubs suitable for grazing and browsing, and introduced forage species *that are managed like rangeland*. Very few cultural treatments are applied to rangeland. The plant community is managed through timing, intensity, duration, and season of use of the grazing. Rangeland is normally stocked at a relatively low rate (1 cow/calf pair per 4-5 acres in Minnesota) and is not managed as intensely as pastureland.

Considerations for Plan Development

GRP allows for some activities and restricts other activities. This must be considered when taking applications for GRP and when preparing conservation plans on lands enrolled in GRP.

Common grazing practices on the land are allowed in a manner that is consistent with maintaining the viability of the natural grass and shrub species.

Haying, mowing, or haying for seed production is allowed, but cannot be done from May 1 to August 1. The exception to this is that up to 25 percent of pastureland enrolled and actively being used for grazing can be mowed for hay during May in order to control the stage of maturity of the forage for grazing management. However, a minimum of 30 acres of contiguous pastureland that is not hayed must be retained.

Construction of facilitating practices (fence, watering facilities. etc.) is allowed. Construction of corrals and handling facilities is prohibited.

Any activity that would disturb the surface of the land covered by the contract is prohibited except for common grazing management practices carried out in a manner consistent with maintaining the functions and values of grassland common to the area, including fire rehabilitation and construction of firebreaks, construction of fences, and restoration practices.

Prescribed Grazing Plan Contents

Plans for Prescribed Grazing systems for GRP will include the following:

- ***Sensitive Areas***

Sensitive areas will be identified and described, and the management strategies for protecting the sensitive areas will be outlined. Sensitive areas in pastures and on rangelands include riparian areas, springs and seeps, steep slopes (especially those that face to the south and southwest), organic soils, very droughty soils, sinkholes, conservation structures, wooded areas, gravel pits and quarries, and cultural resources. This list is not all-inclusive. Other sensitive areas may exist.

- ***Livestock Summary***

All grazing plans will contain a completed *Livestock Forage Monthly Balance Sheet*, or similar inventory sheet that provides information regarding the number, average weight, kind and class of livestock that the grazing system must support. It also summarizes the forages on the site, the forage production, and the balance between the predicted forage consumption and predicted forage consumption. Strategies for any *significant shortages* of forage must be addressed in this section of the grazing plan.

- ***Fencing System***

The plan must address the locations of fences (planned and applied), and describe the kind of fences used (refer to standard for Fence-382). Quantities of fence required to be constructed as a result of subdividing the pasture into paddocks and for lanes must be included. Fence locations must be shown on the conservation plan map.

- ***Livestock Watering System***

The plan must identify the source of the water, method of delivery, and a description of the watering facilities. The conservation plan map must show the locations of wells, ponds, water pipelines, and permanent watering facility locations. The plan must provide quantities of each component that are required. A contingency plan for providing water must be included in the event that the primary water provisions are not adequate, such as when ponds dry up, pumps do not work, or pipelines require maintenance.

- ***Heavy Use Area Protection***

Areas requiring heavy use area protection include livestock lanes and areas surrounding permanently placed watering facilities. The plan must contain the quantities (number of sites, lineal feet of lane), and the plan map must show the locations.

- ***Forages***

Forages in each paddock of the pasture system must be identified in the plan. In addition, areas to be seeded must be identified and the forage mixture specified. The existing condition of the pasture will be described.

- ***Forage Management***

This section of the plan describes the strategies to use in order to maintain the long term viability of the grassland. Items to cover in this section include guidance for initiating and terminating grazing, contingencies for very wet conditions and for drought conditions, grazing management prior to fall freezing, how to manage forage excesses and deficiencies, identification of sacrificial paddocks, rejuvenation of sacrificial paddocks, weed control, pasture fertilization, and livestock overwintering. In addition, management for invasive plant control is required.

Planning on Pastureland

The *Grazing Systems Planning Guide*, which all field offices have, provides detailed planning guidance for pastureland. When preparing a grazing plan for land enrolled into GRP, consider all of the pasture that the farmer/rancher utilizes.

Pastureland grazing systems have relatively high stocking densities, shorter grazing periods (not to exceed 6 days in most systems), and can be managed using cultural treatment methods such as clipping and fertilization.

The minimum number of paddocks required for pastureland grazing systems is based upon the length of the grazing period for each paddock and the required rest period for the forages, and the number of animal herds. This is described on page 13 of the *Grazing System Planning Guide*. Since the longest recommended grazing period for a

paddock is six days and the average rest period for cool season forages is 30 days, the minimum number of paddocks required for a pastureland grazing system for one herd of livestock is 6. If only a portion of the pasture that a farmer or rancher operates is offered into GRP, considerations must be made for the other pasture areas and the six paddock minimum is not applicable to just the GRP area.

Water must be provided to the livestock in the pasture. Optimally, the water should be within 800 feet of the livestock, but there is some allowance for longer distances to water. Whatever is planned must be reasonable. If the livestock have to travel very far for water, overutilization of the forages will occur near the watering facility and underutilization will occur at points away from the watering facility. Inadequate locations of watering facilities will lead to livestock trails and increase the risk of erosion.

Planning on Rangeland

Planning grazing systems on rangelands differs from pastureland in that the stocking density is significantly less and the grazing period for each paddock typically ranges from 10 to 14 days. Typically, there are fewer paddocks required for rangeland grazing systems.

The minimum number of paddocks for rangeland grazing systems is typically 4 paddocks. These paddocks are normally much larger than the paddocks on pastureland.

Water must be provided for the livestock in each of the paddocks on a rangeland grazing system.

Measures of Success

A successful grazing system on either pastureland or rangeland is one in which:

- the guidance for minimum residual stubble heights (refer to practice standard 528A, Prescribed Grazing) is met
- grazing is uniform, but not as a result of overutilization
- the health and vigor of the forages is maintained for long term viability of the grasslands. The *Pasture Condition Scoresheet* is an excellent guide for monitoring the health and vigor of pastures. The *Rangeland Health Ecological Attributes Worksheet*, Exhibit 4-8 of the *National Range and Pasture Handbook*, is excellent for documenting the health of rangelands
- all forms of erosion are controlled
- livestock concentration areas are minimized
- soil compaction is minimized.

Assistance Available

If situations are encountered in the field relating to the course of action to take, or the requirements for a specific operation, assistance is available from any of the following grazing specialists:

Howard Moechnig, State Grazing Specialist (at Rochester Field Office)

Lance Smith, Grazing Specialist for southwest Minnesota (at Marshall Area Office)

Mark Hayek, Grazing Specialist for northwest Minnesota (at Detroit Lakes Field Office)

John Zinn, Grazing Specialist for northeastern Minnesota (at Grand Rapids Field Office)